THE STORY

OF THE

MOOR OF VENICE.

&c. &c.

Giraldi Cinzio (G. B.)

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THE STORY OF THE MOOR OF VENICE.

TRANSLATED FROM THE ITALIAN.

WITH

TWO ESSAYS

ON

SHAKESPEARE,

AND

PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS.

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29

PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS.

IN perusing the various Catalogue of new Publications, with which the British Press is daily teeming, it is natural to be impressed with at least some portion of that impatience and resentment which one of the Roman satirists has expressed against his countrymen with such feeling and animation. At so distant a period it is not possible to know the precise degree of literary insolence which roused his indignation: but if, like his late Imitator amongst us, he waited till every sanctuary of religion had been violated, every pale of authority broken down, and private confidence itself betrayed, we must allow that he did not yield without reason to the severest invective of Criticism.

The ſtructure of the human mind, the natural and unalterable force of human paſſions have, however, rendered it impoſſible to diſcuſs with impunity the myſteries of faith, or the principles of government. Every attempt to ſubvert the old, or to propagate new opinions, moſt aſſuredly kindles a proportionate flame of oppoſition in the breaſt of ſome daring enthuſiaſts, who cling with pious fervour to the prejudices they have been taught to revere, or to the emoluments they have been accuſtomed to enjoy.

In battles conteſted with ſo much fury, it is always dangerous, and generally fruitleſs, to engage. By thoſe who delight in peace, it is better they ſhould be left to disfigure, tear, wound, and demoliſh each other, until the rancour of controverſy, fatigued by its own exceſſes, has ſubſided into ſober reflection, or loſes itſelf, as it more frequently does, in the ſpite and malignity of Impotence. The mild voice of perſuaſion is fraught with maxims too rational to be adopted; and will either not

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be heard at all amidſt ſuch boiſterous and deafening clamours, or elſe will aggravate the venom already collected by the mortification which it offers to the pride of Diſputants.

One obſervation is applicable to all their theories. Such reformers as keep the eye too ſteadily fixed on the dazzling point of abſtract excellence, may gather from the ſtate of their own minds, when ſtruggling againſt the arbitrary propoſitions of their adverſaries, or reſiſting the cautious advice of their friends, a very ſimple and important leſſon of legiſlation. When the paſſions are inflamed and the humours vitiated, the moſt accurate and incontrovertible deductions of reaſon may, by the ſhock of contending principles, be injurious to the cauſe of tranquillity and virtue; and, by repelling with too much diſdain the vices they are deſtined to correct, produce a dangerous and fatal Reſiſtance.

Diſguſted with this view of abilities miſapplied, and lamenting the devaſtations which

the hoſtilities of paſſion have ſometimes been able to carry into the provinces of intellect, we ſhould turn with peculiar complacency to the inſtructive information of the traveller, or the faithful portraits of Biography. It will not, perhaps, be deemed foreign to the purpoſe, for one who is offering conſiderations on individual character, and publiſhing reflections that have occurred to him in a foreign country, to dwell for a moment on the manner in which thoſe two kinds of compoſition are at preſent conducted. It is chiefly among thoſe writers that the moraliſt ſhould endeavour to enforce the laws of honour, of virtue, and of Truth.

The models of antiquity were long held in veneration, and though the range of ſcience be now extended far beyond the limits of Greek or Roman ſpeculation, yet the wiſeſt amongſt us have always conſidered it as dangerous to abandon thoſe great preceptors of mankind, wherever their example could be followed, their opinions known, or their march delineated,

ated. This law, if too univerſally and too injudiciouſly obeyed, might perhaps impoſe a degrading ſervility on modern compoſition. Where the models, however, are unexceptionable, deviation might be deemed folly, and attempts at novelty repreſſed as intemperate innovation. When a meaſure has once been eſtabliſhed as juſt and general, the want of conformity will either be rebuked as literary preſumption, or condemned as literary fraud. At leaſt the author, whoſe title promiſes what his pages do not fulfil, and raiſes expectations which his volumes do not ſatisfy, ſhould be cautious to remove all moral objections to his work; ſhould provide excuſes for what may appear in that ſpecies of compoſition either penurious or exceſſive; and juſtify by his ability, what his fancy or his ambition has ſuggeſted.

The general outline and the rational principles of biographical writing, are to be collected from comparing the lives of Plutarch with the moral and political character of that ſage

philoſopher himſelf. His ſubject was great, intereſting, and important; diſtinguiſhed by ſome pre-eminence of virtue, or remarkable for ſome ſuperiority of talent; ſuch as might either improve us in the exerciſe of our faculties, or exalt our knowledge and love of excellence. His method of treating it was ſimple and energetic; which neither confuſes by a multitude of particulars, nor ſuppreſſes thoſe which are intereſting for fear of obſcuring the predominant quality. His mind was equally capable of illuſtrating his primary purpoſe by the tendency of the inferior topics, or deriving from the conſideration of them alone the great and deciſive delineation of character. It is true that the ſuperſtition of the age in which he lived, and the inexplicable incidents of human life, had induced him to look upon Fortune as a being of rational and divine controul; but this perſuaſion did not prevent him from ſearching rigorouſly into the moral cauſes of ſucceſs, and detecting the follies of indiſcretion. Having himſelf exerciſed ſuch ſubordinate offices of political buſineſs as fell to

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the ſhare of his countrymen, he had learned to diſtinguiſh real from oſtenſible motives; and, amidſt the pomp of embaſſay, or the buſtle of war, could penetrate into the moſt ſecret receſſes of the ſoul. No portion of ancient hiſtory is in itſelf more valuable, or has been executed with greater ſkill, than his diſcuſſion of the conduct of Marius and Silla towards the concluſion of the Jugurthine war. The dangerous ambition of Cæſar is equally expoſed by his defence of Catiline, his conqueſt of Gaul, and his corrupt diſmiſſion of Pompey's Legions.

It was the ſame rare and uncommon quality of detecting the different motives that lead to the ſame action, that enabled Shakeſpeare to pronounce of Brutus and his aſſociates,

" This was the nobleſt Roman of them all:
" All the conſpirators, ſave only he,
" Did that they did in envy of great Cæſar;
" He only, in a general honeſt thought
" And common good to all, made one of them."

JUL. CÆS.

Such maxims as are frequently repeated and held by the perſons of whom he treats, to be general rules of conduct, ſuch witticiſms as diſplay their peculiar turn of thought and vivacity, are properly conſidered by him as conſtituent and eſſential parts of biography. His known partiality for both lively and proverbial ſentences, may afford us equal reaſon to admire the œconomy with which he has uſed them, and the judgment with which they are ſelected.

Biography, conducted upon ſuch principles and with ſo much underſtanding, will ever be ranked among the moſt intereſting and inſtructive ſpecies of compoſition. Converted, as it has been lately in Great Britain, into memoirs* and private anecdotes, it becomes the ſchool

* The Confeſſions of Rouſſeau are undoubtedly an immoral work; but this writer ſeems to have triumphed over criticiſm ſtill more effectually than Shakeſpeare himſelf. He writes to the paſſions in a manner ſo enchanting, that he muſt be in every ſtate of ſociety the favourite author of mankind.

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of vice and treachery; the infamous vehicle in which the ſtrumpet proclaims her debaucheries, and the villain avows his crimes. Did not they find readers, ſuch diſguſting publications would ſcarcely deſerve the honour of being cenſured. But we would willingly ſuppreſs the paſſion by which they are encouraged; that malicious prying curioſity into the ſecrets of family hiſtory, where diſſipation and idleneſs ſeek for apologies in divulging the weakneſs and folly of others. Offences are not committed without the hope of profit or of praiſe. A ſuitable degree of public virtue and reſentment would have ſhut theſe babblers up for ever in the vaults of Silence.

What ſhall we ſay of the manner in which Dr. Johnſon has been treated by thoſe who have apparently ſacrificed his reputation to the light and ridiculous vanity of informing the world how well they knew him. If this extraordinary man be ſuppoſed to reſemble Socrates in his genius and moral character, his fortune has certainly not been ſimilar in finding

ing a Plato and a Xenophon to ſupport his doctrines, and record his Virtues.

Much cannot be learned from the report of converſation, to which he ſeems generally to have been provoked by his companions, for the ſole purpoſe of ſwelling his own poſthumous memoirs. The mind when exaſperated by impertinence, or forced into action by reiterated queſtions, ſhews but a very unfaithful ſpecimen of its powers. The capricious humour, or the favourite idea of the day, the caſual ſtate of health and ſpirits, the very atmoſphere itſelf, may colour the natural diſpoſition with a degree of ſpleen or cheerfulneſs to which it is not allied. A ſtrong propenſity, which would have vaniſhed before the tranquil and intenſe reflection of a ſtudy, may betray the ſpeaker into erroneous or immoral propoſitions. Fortunately however for mankind, they are not condemned to ſearch in theſe deplorable ſketches for the character of that excellent writer. But if, by any miraculous revolution in what ſeems to be the eſtabliſhed

order of events, theſe poſthumous volumes ſhould ſurvive the works of Johnſon himſelf, he will then appear to have been a tyrant in ſociety as well as politics; a perverſe unprincipled reaſoner in morality, and a bigot in religion. Yet one of thoſe, who have thus disfigured him, boaſts that his book is ſailing down the ſtream of Time, while every admirer of literary excellence, every obſerver of the ſacred laws of friendſhip, muſt wiſh it to be finally and irretrievably loſt in the ocean of Oblivion.

There is another very numerous claſs of writers who have quitted the ancient models; and, it muſt be confeſſed, not entirely without plauſibility, if we conſider the vaſt improvements in the art of travelling ſince Herodotus publiſhed his account of Ægyptian Antiquities, and Pauſanias expreſſed his admiration of Grecian ability and taſte. It does not appear however that the change has ariſen ſo much from any allowed ſuperiority in the new method, as from the importance which theſe

authors

authors have conſpired to attribute to their own feelings and reflections. Travels are not now a hiſtory of art, or a criticiſm on its remains; a delineation of manners, or an analyſis of government; but an account of the writer's own activity and talents: his recollections, his raptures, and diſguſts, of which the reader cannot always diſcern the reaſon, or acknowledge the juſtneſs. There is, however, one point in which the method of Herodotus might have been adopted with advantage, and where it does not appear that the egotiſm of the modern compiler would have ſuffered any material degree of mortification. It would be adviſeable for him, perhaps, whenever he is relating any circumſtance ſo miraculous, that the credulity of his readers may not diſpoſe them to implicit belief, not to ſupport the legend with a perſonal aſſertion, but frankly aſcribe it to the women or the prieſts from whom it was originally received.

When ſuch men publiſh, without a bluſh, the moſt ſcandalous libels on their friends, their

their hoſts, and their protectors; on ambaſſadors, at whoſe tables they have been fed, and at whoſe expence they have travelled, Impudence itſelf is affrighted by their effrontory; and even Ingratitude joins with all the common feelings of humanity, to decry their baſeneſs and perpetuate their Infamy.

An extreme veneration for the excellent writers of antiquity, does not prevent us from paying due reſpect to ſuch of the moderns as have either contributed to the honour of their own country, or to the general embelliſhment of ſociety. It would be ſtrange indeed if, to an Engliſhman reſiding long in the ſtate of Venice, where ſo many of his ſcenes are laid, Shakeſpeare did not appear to merit as much of his notice as the moſt venerable claſſics of Greece and Rome. It is a ſingular circumſtance in the writing of this author, that all thoſe pieces which are founded on authentic hiſtory are infinitely leſs intereſting, if not inferior in point of compoſition, to thoſe which are drawn from Romance, or (if any ſuch there be) from his own imagination. This reflection makes us naturally deſirous of exam-

examining the ſources from whence he derived the outlines of his ſtory. To gratify thoſe who may be ſtimulated by ſuch a curioſity, has been the motive for executing the following Tranſlation. The Eſſays with which it is accompanied, do not pretend to be complete diſſertations on the tragedies whoſe titles they bear, but only to contain ſome remarks not offered by others, or at leaſt not with the ſame view in their Application.

ON THE TRAGEDY

OF

CORIOLANUS.

STORY

OF

CORIOLANUS.

IT is the duty of the hiſtorian to record the tranſactions of which he undertakes to treat, with ſuch ſcrupulous and impartial fidelity, that the imagination ſhould never be ſuffered to exerciſe its powers to amplify or diminiſh them. The love of truth is the only paſſion which hiſtory ſhould ever attempt to gratify; and this gratification is always impaired by any mixture of obſervation which leſſens or deſtroys the ſimplicity of facts. But as human actions ariſe from and have a continual reference to human paſſions, the reader of genius will be warmed by their peruſal, and will find a perpetual fund of enthuſiaſm and indignation in viewing the patience of

ſuffering virtue, or the oppreſſion of unrelenting tyranny. The ſenſibility thus originally excited by a divine and ſpontaneous operation of the ſoul, is prompted by its natural expanſion to communicate itſelf to the boſoms and the feelings of others. All the treaſures of Nature are open to the imagination that burns with this glowing deſire of ſympathy; and language itſelf aſſumes a ſuperior tone of elevation and Dignity.

Whatever has been fabulouſly attributed to the inſpiration of Caſtalia and Helicon is then really infuſed into the human breaſt, which pours forth from an inexhauſtible ſource of ſentiment the ſtreams of a rich and genuine poetry. If then the object of Hiſtory be to inform the mind, and that of Poetry to rouſe the ſenſibility, as the moſt philoſophical critics have long ago determined, it is evident that theſe two claſſes of compoſition will require to be governed by very different laws and regulations. The page of the hiſtorian will be loaded with a minute detail of various particulars,

culars, which by the poet muſt be moulded into one general maſs of intereſting and important action. To facilitate this great and neceſſary operation, he is not only permitted to change the real ſucceſſion of events, but allowed to invent and ſubſtitute others more affecting, when thoſe which have actually happened are too mean or trivial for his purpoſe. In the republic of letters a permiſſion is frequently equivalent to a command; and the poet will be condemned and rejected for that very fidelity and preciſion for which the hiſtorian has been rewarded with applauſe and laurels. Nor is this to be wondered at, ſince even the duties of morality are liable to the ſame variations. It is the exalted privilege of reaſon to appreciate the value of virtue herſelf, which loſes its quality and changes its nature, if exerciſed in oppoſition to the dictates of prudence and Diſcretion.

If theſe obſervations be juſt, it is time to apply them to the tragedy before us. We muſt ſuppoſe that the reader has already been

apprized of ſome obſervations made by his commentators on the hiſtorical plays of Shakeſpeare. They are there conſidered as a new and ſingular ſpecies of compoſition, which ought not to be ſubjected to an examination guided by the laws which a rigorous tribunal has eſtabliſhed for theatrical repreſentations in general. Did we indeed find in them only violations of dramatic unities, and deviations from certain formalities which cuſtom and prejudice have ordained, we ſhould willingly leave them to the cenſure of Voltaire, and to the apologies which thoſe have produced in their favour, who are conducted by a freer ſpirit in literary labours. But in aſſuming the dramatic form they ought at leaſt to have conformed to the dramatic principle: they ought not to have been, as Coriolanus will be found to be, a minute and exact copy of hiſtorical detail, in which the action has acquired no additional intereſt or ſolidity from the art or combination of the poet. This is a defect which inſtead of awakening our ſympathy, leaves us in a cold

indifference

indifference about the cataſtrophe which the author is preparing for us; and becomes an inexcuſable violation of a fundamental law of nature and criticiſm. Such an offence can neither be veiled or extenuated by the dexterity and genius with which the author may have aſſigned proper and characteriſtic ſentiments to the perſons of his drama, nor by the new materials with which he has decorated and enlarged the biographical fabric of Plutarch. We may praiſe the religious ſcruples and the careful veneration with which the Romans tranſported to the capitol the gods of their conquered provinces; and prepared for them a more magnificent altar, and a more ſplendid ritual of adoration and ſacrifice. But the eye of rational morality will yet be able to diſtinguiſh the injuſtice with which they were invaded, and the cruel rapacity with which they were plundered.

The hiſtorical plays of Shakeſpeare are however always a lively and ingenious comment on thoſe events, which he ſelects for the

exerciſe of his obſervation and talents. It will be found perhaps that he merits the higheſt degree of praiſe for the execution of this part of his work, and for the pleaſure the reader receives from it, if we examine for a moment the character of Coriolanus himſelf. In doing this we ſhall not be led into any long or philoſophical diſquiſition of his moral qualities: it is ſufficient to refer them only to that ſpecies of intereſt and ſympathy which tragedy aims at inſpiring. If it appears that the character of the principal hero of the drama is but ill adapted to produce the effects which the intereſt of the tragic muſe requires, and the compoſition itſelf is ſtill attractive, it will be evident he has executed with a maſterly hand his hiſtorical portraits, and aſſigned to each of them natural ſentiments with a juſt and forcible expreſſion. This intereſt if conſidered in general, is however far too weak for tragical exhibition; but if we recollect the partial curioſity with which every nation views the characters and events of its own hiſtory, it will reaſonably account for the favour and reputa-

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tion he ſtill enjoys in his own country, and the pleaſure with which an Engliſh audience liſtens to the virtues or the crimes of former kings. To excite by illuſion a fictitious ſentiment of grief or compaſſion, is perhaps the moſt delicate operation of human art. The mind, when expoſed to theſe trials, becomes jealous of its own dignity and firmneſs; and, if the utmoſt ſkill be not exerted to ſeduce it, obſtinately refuſes to yield to tender or pathetic impreſſions. The ſufferer in real life, on the firſt view of his miſery and wretchedneſs, excites our ſympathy and obtains our pardon, although his torments have been occaſioned by his own guilt or incapacity. But in the poetical repreſentations of humanity, pity loſes its facility, and inſtead of its former character of a natural emotion, aſſumes the diſcretion and reſerve of a moral virtue. Simple diſtreſs is then no longer able to draw us from our indifference, or diſturb our ſerenity. Before our tears will flow for an imaginary ſufferer, we muſt not only be perſuaded that neither his vices nor his errors have contributed

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to his afflictions, but alſo that he poſſeſſes a ſufficient degree of merit and virtue to engage our affection and Eſteem.

Courage, accompanied with an extreme degree of military ardour and activity, ſeems to have been the only good quality poſſeſſed by Coriolanus. This is a virtue which we eaſily praiſe and admire; but if it be not united with the refined taſte and the poliſhed humanity of Scipio, it has certainly no claim to our love, no hold on our attachment. Valour tinctured with ferocity, becomes an object of terror and diſguſt to the very people for whoſe honour or protection it has been nobly and ſucceſſfully exerted. It produced in Coriolanus a rude and barbarous demeanour, which we ſhould not be extremely ſorry even in real life to ſee chaſtiſed, much leſs in the ſhadows of a theatrical Repreſentation.

It is certainly poſſible for one individual to render very important ſervices to another, with ſuch haughtineſs and aſperity of manner, that he

he who receives the favour may reaſonably conſider himſelf as abſolved from all the ties and obligations of gratitude. If this be lawful in our private and domeſtic capacities, it is certainly more unequivocally juſt with regard to the community at large; where it is the duty of every individual portion of the people to contribute as much as lies in his power to the public good. He is but a falſe and ſuſpicious patriot who, when arrived at diſtinction, ſeeks only to give a freer ſcope to his inſolence and tyranny; and thinks that when he has once given general proofs of the love of his country, he may indulge without reſtraint his hatred and contempt for his fellow-citizens. The public will not be long held in ſubjection to the authority of paſt ſervices; and exile is not perhaps too ſevere a puniſhment for one who conſiders his countrymen as vilified by his own appearance amongſt them, and diſhonoured by his own ſuperior and exalted Proweſs.

When we ſee this baniſhed hero animated with a bloody ſpirit of revenge, returning to burn

burn and pillage his native country we almoſt deſire his death. In that awful and tremendous moment, when he has by the violence of his own conduct reduced himſelf to the dreadful alternative of deſtroying Rome or devoting himſelf, we feel the influence of the tragic paſſions; but we are not perſuaded that he deſerves to live, till the fatal inſtant when he has reſolved to die.

> "My mother, mother, Oh!
> You've won a happy victory to Rome.
> But for your Son, believe it, Oh! believe it,
> Moſt dang'rouſly with him you have prevail'd;
> If not moſt mortal to him. Let it come."

are perhaps the only verſes in the whole piece that breathe the true and genuine ſpirit of the tragic muſe. Hiſtory affords no example; nor is it poſſible for the imagination to conceive a more perfect ſituation, nor a more auſpicious opportunity of atoning for abuſed authority, violated patriotiſm, and filial diſobedience. It appears therefore that the life of Coriolanus is not a ſubject well

adapted

adapted to tragedy; firſt, on account of the confuſion ariſing from the variety and minuteneſs of hiſtorical detail: and ſecondly on account of the rough, unpleaſant, and perhaps diſguſting character which he diſcovers in his political and domeſtic conduct. But were the manner of his repentance and his death to be choſen by a poet of ſuitable feeling and capacity, the theatre might derive from it one of its moſt moral and intereſting exhibitions. Every one ſees to what a beautiful and ſublime ſeries of pathetic ſentiments this ſubject would lead; in developing the patriotiſm of Volumnia contraſted by her maternal affection; in unfolding the different ſhades of the ſame patriotiſm obſtructed by the conjugal tenderneſs of Virgilia. The breaſt of Coriolanus himſelf would be diſturbed by an obſtinate and full-grown ſpirit of revenge, ſilently oppoſed by the ſpectre of diſhonour that frights him from its gratification; loudly pleaded againſt by the friends of his youth and the protectors of his childhood, and finally overcome by filial and wedded Love. A

purer,

purer ſacrifice of private affections was never offered by any family at the ſhrine of public Virtue.

In ſcenes of ſuch tender expoſtulation, it would be undoubtedly difficult to preſerve thoſe hardy outlines of the Roman character, which conſtantly degraded the female ſex in all their civil regulations. It is indeed ſurprizing, that a nation which had twice overturned the form of their government to avenge the violence which their chief magiſtrates had offered to women, ſhould never have conceived the project of emancipating them from their domeſtic ſlavery. Was it becauſe the authority of public opinion had proſcribed as a weakneſs the workings of natural affection; or becauſe a momentary acceſs of enthuſiaſm had overpowered the habitual ſentiment of Tyranny? *

But

* We are rather inclined to favour the latter opinion. The ſervice rendered by Volumnia to her country was certainly important, and had been purchaſed by her at the

But there are virtues in a barbarous ſtate of ſociety, which the pride and vanity of civilized nations can neither conceive nor imitate. The Goths and the Vandals had buried in one common tomb the vices and the elegancies of the ancient world, that the manners of men might be moulded anew, and receive from an equal influence of both the ſexes their due proportion of ſocial gaiety. And if, as Mr. Hume ſomewhere ſuppoſes, the ſages of ancient learning returning to their chair of inſtruction, would deride the gentleneſs and humanity of modern Europe, we ſhould ſtill have the courage to reject with diſdain their unmanly propoſition, and fight with invincible obſtinacy againſt the contagion of their Brutality.

the price of all that was deareſt to her. Yet the temple raiſed upon this occaſion was not conſecrated to female merit, but to female Fortune.

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MOOR OF VENICE.

ADVERTISEMENT.

IT is very unſatisfactory to offer to the public a tranſlation which very few will have an opportunity of comparing with the original. I have been deterred from printing the Story of Giraldi along with the preſent verſion by my unwillingneſs to enlarge the bulk of a volume which bears the name of one who never before offered any compoſition to the public eye. Beſides I am in hopes that ſoon will be publiſhed in Italian a tranſlation of ſome of the plays of Shakeſpeare, where the original novels may appear with greater propriety. Such a work has been undertaken at Padua by a perſon perfectly equal to the taſk, and is at preſent in ſome forwardneſs. The Engliſh in general will not hear of ſuch a publication, on account of the difficulty which they ſuppoſe foreigners muſt meet with in underſtanding Shakeſpeare. But it may be obſerved on

he other hand, that the ſcenes of Shakeſpeare contain ſo much minute knowledge of local cuſtoms that they can only be underſtood by the people of the country. I ſhall mention one inſtance in Othello—

The Clown, at the begining of the third act, aſks the muſicians if their inſtruments have been at Naples, that they ſpeak in the noſe thus. The Commentator obſerves on this paſſage, that the venereal diſeaſe firſt made its appearance at the ſiege of Naples. There are few clowns in Italy that know this; but every clown there knows that Pulcinella is the Neapolitan maſk, and that Pulcinella ſpeaks through his noſe. He generally knows too, that the man who plays this puppet, puts into his mouth a reed ſimilar to that which is placed in the orifice of the hautboy.

THE MOOR OF VENICE.

TRANSLATED FROM THE ITALIAN

OF

GIAN BATTISTA GIRALDI CINTIO,

OF

FERRARA.

THERE was once in Venice a Moor of great merit, who for his perſonal courage, and the proofs he had given of his conduct, as well as his vigorous genius in the affairs of war, was held in great eſteem by thoſe gentlemen who, in rewarding patriotic ſervices, excel all the republics that ever exiſted. It happened that a virtuous woman of great beauty called Deſdemona, not drawn by female appetite, but by the virtue of the Moor, fell in love with him; and he, ſubdued by the charms and noble ſentiments of the lady, be-

came equally enamoured of her. Their paſſion was ſo ſucceſsful that they were married, although her relations did all in their power to make her take another huſband. They lived together in ſuch peace and concord while they were at Venice, that there never paſſed between them either word or action that was not expreſſive of affection. The Venetians reſolving to change the garriſon which they maintain in Cyprus, elected the Moor to the command of the troops which they deſtined for that iſland. Although he was extremely pleaſed with the honour propoſed to him (as it is a dignity conferred only on thoſe who are noble, brave, truſty, and of approved courage) yet was his joy diminiſhed when he reflected on the length and inconvenience of the voyage, ſuppoſing that Deſdemona muſt be very averſe to undertaking it. His wife, who valued nothing in the world but her huſband, and rejoiced exceedingly in the teſtimony of approbation ſo lately ſhewn him by a powerful and celebrated republic, was extremely impatient for the departure of the troops, that ſhe might

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accompany him to a poſt of ſo much honour. But ſhe was very much vexed at ſeeing the Moor diſturbed; and, not knowing the reaſon, ſaid to him one day at dinner, "How can you be ſo melancholy after having received from the Senate ſo high and ſo honourable a diſtinction?"—'My love for you, Deſdemona,' replied the Moor, 'diſturbs my enjoyment of the rank conferred upon me, ſince I am now expoſed to this alternative—I muſt either endanger your life by ſea, or leave you at Venice. The firſt would be terrible, as I ſhall ſuffer extremely from every fatigue you undergo, from every danger that threatens you: the ſecond would render me inſupportable to myſelf, as parting from you would be parting from my life.'—"Ah! huſband," returned Deſdemona, "why do you perplex yourſelf with ſuch idle imaginations? I will follow you wherever you go, though it were neceſſary to paſs through fire inſtead of only going by water in a ſafe and well equipped veſſel. If there are dangers in the way, I will ſhare them with you; and indeed your

affection for me could not be great, if you thought of leaving me at Venice to ſave me from a ſea-voyage, or believed that I would rather remain here in ſecurity than ſhare with you both danger and fatigue. I inſiſt therefore on your preparing for the voyage with all that cheerfulneſs which your dignity ought to inſpire." The Moor then tenderly embraced his wife, ſaying, "May Heaven long preſerve us in this degree of reciprocal affection." Soon afterwards, having ſettled his affairs and prepared the neceſſary ſtores, he went on board the galley with his wife and his company, and ſailed for Cyprus with a favourable wind. He had in his company an enſign of a very amiable outward appearance, but whoſe character was extremely treacherous and baſe. He had impoſed on the Moor's ſimplicity ſo ſucceſsfully, that he had gained his friendſhip; for although he was in fact a very great coward, yet his carriage and converſation were ſo haughty and full of pretenſion, that you would have taken him for a Hector or an Achilles. This raſcal had alſo conducted his wife with

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him to Cyprus, who was a handſome and diſcreet woman; and being an Italian, Deſdemona was ſo fond of her, that they paſſed the greateſt part of their time together. In the ſame company was alſo a lieutenant, to whom the Moor was much attached. The lieutenant went often to the Moor's houſe, and dined frequently with him and his wife. Deſdemona ſeeing that the Moor was ſo fond of him, ſhewed him every mark of attention and civility, with which the Moor was much pleaſed. The deteſtable enſign, forgetting his duty to his own wife, and violating all the laws of friendſhip, honour, and gratitude with which he was bound to the Moor, fell paſſionately in love with Deſdemona, and thought only how he might enjoy her. He dared not however avow himſelf, for fear the Moor if he diſcovered it ſhould inſtantly put him to death. He ſought by all the private means in his power to make Deſdemona conſcious of his love. But ſhe was ſo entirely taken up with the Moor, that ſhe thought neither of him nor of any one elſe; and all that he did

to engage her affections produced not the leaſt effect. He then took it into his head, that this neglect aroſe from her being pre-engaged in favour of the lieutenant; and not only determined to get rid of him, but changed his affection for her into the moſt bitter hatred. He ſtudied beſides how he might prevent in future the Moor from living happily with Deſdemona, ſhould his paſſion not be gratified after he had murdered the lieutenant. Revolving in his mind a variety of methods, all impious and abominable, he at laſt determined to accuſe her to the Moor of adultery with the lieutenant. But knowing the Moor's great affection for Deſdemona and his friendſhip for the lieutenant, he plainly ſaw that unleſs his deceit was very artfully conducted, it would be impoſſible to make him think ill of either of them. For this reaſon he determined to wait till time and place afforded him a fit opportunity for entering on his wicked deſign; and it was not long before the Moor degraded the lieutenant for having drawn his ſword and wounded a ſoldier upon guard.

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This accident was ſo painful to Deſdemona, that ſhe often tried to obtain for him her huſband's pardon. In the mean time the Moor had obſerved to the enſign, that his wife teazed him ſo much in favour of the lieutenant, that he feared he ſhould be obliged at laſt to reſtore him to his commiſſion. This appeared to that villain the proper moment for opening his ſcheme of treachery, which he began by ſaying, "Perhaps Deſdemona is fond of his company."—'And why?' ſaid the Moor.—"Nay," replied he, "I do not chuſe to meddle between man and wife; but if you watch her properly, you will underſtand me." Nor would he, to the earneſt entreaties of the Moor, afford any further explanation. Theſe words had ſtung the Moor ſo ſeverely, that he endeavoured perpetually to find out their meaning, and became exceedingly melancholy. Whereupon, when his wife ſometime afterwards repeated her ſolicitations that he would forgive the lieutenant, and not ſacrifice the ſervice and friendſhip of ſo many years to one ſlight fault, particularly as the lieutenant and

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the ſoldier were friends again, the Moor grew angry, and ſaid to her, "It is ſomewhat extraordinary, Deſdemona, that you ſhould take ſo much trouble about this fellow; he is neither your brother nor your relation, that he ſhould claim ſo much of your affection." His wife with much ſweetneſs and humility replied, 'I have no other motive for ſpeaking, than the pain it gives me to ſee you deprived of ſo excellent a friend as you have always told me the lieutenant was to you. I hope you will not be angry with me; yet his fault does not merit ſo much of your hatred: but you Moors are of ſo warm a conſtitution, that every trifle tranſports you with anger and revenge.' The Moor, ſtill more irritated by theſe words, replied, "Perhaps one who ſuſpects it not may learn that by experience; I will be revenged for the injuries done to me, ſo thoroughly, that I ſhall be ſatisfied." His wife was much terrified by theſe expreſſions, and ſeeing him, for the firſt time, in a paſſion with her, ſubmiſſively anſwered, 'I have none but the pureſt motives for ſpeaking on the buſineſs: but not to

diſpleaſe

diſpleaſe you in future, I promiſe never to ſpeak of it again.' The Moor, on this new application made by his wife in favour of the lieutenant, imagined that the enſign's words meant that ſhe was in love with him: he therefore went to that ſcoundrel in a ſtate of great dejection, and endeavoured to make him ſpeak more intelligibly. The enſign bent on the ruin of this poor woman, after feigning an unwillingneſs to ſay any thing to her diſadvantage, and at laſt pretending to yield to the vehement entreaties of the Moor, ſaid, "I cannot conceal the pain I feel in being under the neceſſity of making a diſcovery which will be to you ſo very ſhocking; but ſince you inſiſt on it, and the attention which I ought to pay to the honour of my commanding-officer, prompts me to ſpeak, I will not now refuſe to ſatisfy your demand and my own duty. You muſt know then that Deſdemona is only diſpleaſed at ſeeing you angry with the lieutenant, becauſe, when he comes to your houſe, ſhe conſoles herſelf with him for the diſguſt which your blackneſs now occaſions her to feel."

feel." Theſe words penetrated to the very bottom of the Moor's heart; but to be better informed (although his previous ſuſpicion made him give great credit to the enſign's information) he aſſumed a threatening countenance and ſaid, 'I know not what prevents me from cutting out that inſolent tongue of yours that has ſo impudently attacked the honour of my wife.' The enſign then replied, "I expected no other reward for this friendly office of mine; but ſince my duty has made me go ſo far, and my regard for your honour ſtill remains, I tell you again that the caſe is ſo; and if her feigned affection for you has blindfolded you to ſuch a degree that you have not ſeen what is ſo very viſible, that does not at all leſſen the truth of my aſſertion. The lieutenant himſelf, who is one of thoſe who are not content with their own enjoyments when ſome other is not made acquainted with them, told me ſo; and," added he, "if I had not feared your diſpleaſure, I would have given him at the time that death he merited. But ſince the information I give you,

you, which concerns you more than any one elſe, makes you treat me ſo very improperly, I am ſorry I did not hold my tongue, that I might have avoided giving you offence." The Moor then anſwered, in great agitation, 'If you do not make me to ſee with my own eyes the truth of what you tell me, be aſſured that I will make you wiſh you had been born dumb.'— "This would have been eaſy enough," replied the villain, "when he came to your houſe: but now that you have driven him away for a much lighter reaſon than that which ought to have baniſhed him thence, it will be difficult to prove it. For though I think yet that he continues to enjoy Deſdemona whenever you give him an opportunity, he muſt neceſſarily proceed with greater caution now than he did before he had incurred your diſpleaſure. But I do not deſpair of making you ſee that which upon my word you will not believe." They then ſeparated. The poor Moor went home with a barbed arrow in his ſide, waiting impatiently for the day when the enſign ſhould ſhew him what

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was to render him for ever miſerable. But the known purity of Deſdemona's conduct gave no leſs uneaſineſs to the villanous enſign, becauſe he was afraid he ſhould not be able to convince the Moor of what he had ſo falſely aſſured him. He applied himſelf therefore to the invention of new malice, and deviſed other expedients. I have already ſaid that Deſdemona went frequently to the enſign's houſe, and paſſed great part of the day with his wife. The villain had obſerved that ſhe often brought with her a handkerchief that the Moor had given her, and which, as it was very delicately worked in the Mooriſh taſte, was very highly valued by them both; he determined to ſteal it, and by its means complete her ruin. He had a little girl of three years old that was much careſſed by Deſdemona; and one day, when that unhappy woman was on a viſit to this villain, he took up the child in his arms and preſented it to Deſdemona, who received it and preſſed it to her boſom. In the ſame inſtant this deceiver ſtole from her faſh the handkerchief, with ſuch dexterity,

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that ſhe did not perceive him; and went away with it in very high ſpirits. Deſdemona went home, and taken up with other thoughts never recollected her handkerchief till ſome days after; when, not being able to find it, ſhe began to fear that the Moor ſhould aſk her for it as he often did. The infamous enſign watching his opportunity went to the lieutenant, and to aid his wicked purpoſe left the handkerchief on his bolſter. The lieutenant did not find it till the next morning, when, getting up, he ſet his foot upon it as it had fallen to the floor. Not being able to imagine how it came there and knowing it to be Deſdemona's, he determined to carry it back to her; and, waiting till the Moor was gone out, he went to the back-door and knocked. Fortune, who ſeemed to have conſpired along with the enſign the death of this poor woman, brought the Moor home in the ſame inſtant. Hearing ſome one knock he went to the window, and, much diſturbed, aſked who is there? The lieutenant hearing his voice, and fearing that when he came down he ſhould do him

ſome miſchief, ran away without anſwering; the Moor came down, and finding no one either at the door or in the ſtreet, returned full of ſuſpicion to his wife, and aſked if ſhe knew who it was that had knocked. She anſwered with great truth that ſhe knew not. " But I think," ſaid he, " it was the lieutenant;"—' It might be he,' ſaid ſhe, ' or any one elſe.' The Moor checked himſelf at the time though he was violently enraged, and determined to take no ſtep without firſt conſulting the enſign. To him he immediately went, and related what had juſt happened, begging him to learn from the lieutenant what he could on the ſubject. The enſign rejoiced much in this accident, and promiſed to do ſo. He contrived to enter into diſcourſe with him one day in a place where the Moor might ſee them. He talked with him on a very different ſubject, laughed much, and expreſſed by his motions and attitudes very great ſurprize. The Moor as ſoon as he ſaw them ſeparate went to the enſign, and deſired to know what had paſſed between them. The enſign, after

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many ſolicitations, at laſt told him that he had concealed nothing from him. He ſays he has enjoyed your wife every time that you have ſtaid long enough from home to give him an opportunity; and that in their laſt interview ſhe had made him a preſent of that handkerchief which you gave her. The Moor thanked him, and thought that if his wife had no longer the handkerchief in her poſſeſſion, it would be a proof that the enſign had told him the truth. For which reaſon one day after dinner among other ſubjects he aſked her for this handkerchief. The poor woman, who had long apprehended this, bluſhed exceſſively at the queſtion, and to hide her change of colour, which the Moor had very accurately obſerved, ran to her wardrobe and pretended to look for it. After having ſearched for ſome time, "I cannot conceive," ſaid ſhe, "what is become of it! have not you taken it?"— 'Had I taken it,' replied he, 'I ſhould not have aſked you for it. But you may look for it another time more at your eaſe.' Leaving her then, he began to reflect what would

be the beſt way of putting to death his wife and the lieutenant, and how he might avoid being proſecuted for the murder. Thinking night and day on this ſubject, he could not prevent Deſdemona from perceiving that his behaviour to her was very different from what it had been formerly. She often aſked him what it was that agitated him ſo violently. You who were once the merrieſt man alive, are now the moſt melancholy. The Moor anſwered and alleged a variety of reaſons, but ſhe was not ſatisfied with any of them; and knowing that ſhe had done nothing to juſtify ſo much agitation, ſhe began to fear that he grew tired of her. She once in converſation with the enſign's wife expreſſed herſelf thus:— "I know not what to ſay of the Moor; he uſed to treat me moſt affectionately; and I begin to fear that my example will teach young women never to marry againſt their parents conſent, and the Italians in particular, not to connect themſelves with men from whom they are ſeparated by nature, climate, education, and complexion. But as I know him to be

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the confidential of your huſband whom he conſults on all occaſions, I intreat you, if you have heard any thing that might explain this myſtery and be of uſe to me, not to deny me your aſſiſtance." Theſe words were accompanied with a flood of Tears.

The enſign's wife, who knew all (as her huſband had in vain endeavoured to prevail upon her to become an accomplice in the murder of Deſdemona) but durſt tell her nothing for fear of her huſband, only ſaid, 'Take care not to give the Moor any cauſe for ſuſpicion; and do all in your power to convince him of your affection and fidelity.' —"Why ſo I do," ſaid ſhe, "but to no purpoſe." The Moor, in the mean time, did all in his power to prove what he deſired not to find true, and begged the enſign to make him ſee the handkerchief in poſſeſſion of the lieutenant. Although this was a difficult undertaking, yet the villain promiſed to do all in his power to give him a ſatisfactory proof of this. The lieutenant had a woman in the

houſe, who was a notable embroiderer in muſlin, and who, ſtruck with the beauty of Deſdemona's handkerchief, determined to copy it before it ſhould be returned to her. She ſet about making one like it and while ſhe was at work, the enſign diſcovered that ſhe ſat at a window where any one who paſſed in the ſtreet might ſee her. This he took care to point out to the Moor, who was then fully perſuaded that his chaſte and innocent wife was an adultreſs. He agreed with the enſign to kill both her and the lieutenant; and conſulting together about the means, the Moor intreated him to undertake the aſſaſſination of the officer, promiſing never to forget ſo great an obligation. He refuſed however to attempt what was ſo very difficult and dangerous, as the lieutenant was equally brave and vigilant; but with much entreaty and conſiderable preſents, he was prevailed on to ſay that he would hazard the experiment. One dark night, after taking this reſolution, he obſerved the lieutenant coming out of the houſe of a female libertine where he uſually paſſed his evenings,

evenings, and aſſaulted him ſword in hand. He ſtruck at his legs with a view of bringing him to the ground, and with the firſt blow cut him quite through the right thigh. The poor man inſtantly fell and the enſign ran to him to put him to death. But the lieutenant, who was courageous and familiar with wounds and ſlaughter, having drawn his ſword notwithſtanding his deſperate ſituation, and raiſed himſelf for defence, cried out Murder as loud as he could. The enſign perceiving that ſome people were coming, and that the ſoldiers quartered thereabouts had taken the alarm, fled for fear of being caught, and turning about again pretended likewiſe that he had been brought there by the noiſe. Placing himſelf among the reſt and ſeeing that the leg was cut off, he concluded that though he was not dead, he muſt die of his wound; and although he was exceedingly rejoiced at all this, yet he condoled with the lieutenant as much as if he had been his brother. The next morning this accident was ſpread all over the city, and came to the ears of Deſdemona,

who being very compaſſionate, and not ſuſpecting that this could occaſion miſchief to herſelf, expreſſed the greateſt concern for the lieutenant's misfortune. The Moor drew from hence the worſt of inferences, and ſaid to the enſign, "You muſt know that my ſimpleton of a wife is almoſt mad with ſorrow for the lieutenant's accident."—'How could it be otherwiſe,' ſaid he, 'as he is her life and ſoul?'—"How," ſaid the Moor, "her life and her ſoul! I will ſeparate her ſoul from her body. I ſhould diſgrace my manhood if I killed her not." And diſcourſing together if poiſon or the dagger would be beſt, and not liking either the one or the other, the enſign ſaid, 'A method has occurred to me that would ſatisfy you without creating the leaſt ſuſpicion. The houſe where you live is very old, and the ceiling of your chamber is broken in many places. Deſdemona might be beaten to death with a ſtocking full of ſand, and no marks of this would remain on the body: when ſhe is dead we will pull down a part of the ceiling, and bruiſe your wife's head; the n

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give out that a beam in falling has done this, and killed her. If you follow this advice you will avoid all ſuſpicion, and every one will believe her death to have been accidental.' This ſavage advice pleaſed the Moor; and waiting for a convenient opportunity, he concealed the enſign one night in a cloſet that communicated with their chamber. When they were in bed the enſign according to his inſtruction made a noiſe in the cloſet, and the Moor immediately aſked his wife if ſhe had heard it? She anſwered Yes.—"Get up then and ſee what it is." Poor Deſdemona obeyed, and as ſoon as ſhe was near the cloſet-door the enſign ruſhed out, and with the ſtocking that he had prepared gave her a violent blow on the ſmall of the back. She fell down ſcarce able to breathe; but with what little force ſhe had, ſhe called the Moor to her aſſiſtance. He got out of bed, and ſaid to her, "Moſt infamous woman, you are now to receive the juſt reward of your infidelity!—even ſo are thoſe wives treated who, pretending to love their huſbands, are untrue to their beds." The

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poor woman hearing theſe words, and feeling that ſhe was ready to expire from a ſecond blow that the enſign had given her, ſaid, ‘ That ſince the juſtice of this world was refuſed her, ſhe atteſted the Divine Juſtice in favour of her honour and her truth ;’ and invoking the Divine Aſſiſtance, ſhe was finiſhed by the impious enſign, who ſtruck her a third time. Afterwards they placed her in bed; and after breaking her ſkull, they drew down, as they had determined beforehand, a part of the ceiling. The Moor then called out for help as the houſe was falling. The neighbours on this alarm ran thither, and found Deſdemona dead under the beams. Her life had been ſo virtuous that every one lamented her fate; and the following day ſhe was buried, to the great ſorrow of the whole iſland. But God who is a juſt Obſerver of the hearts of men, ſuffered not ſo great a crime to paſs without the puniſhment that was due to it. So that the Moor, who had loved Deſdemona more than his eyes, finding himſelf deprived of her, began to regret her ſo extremely, that

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he almoſt loſt his ſenſes, and went about the houſe looking for her in every room. Reflecting beſides that the enſign had been the cauſe of his loſing along with her all the enjoyments of life, and even his own faculties, that villain became ſo inſupportable to him that he could not bear the ſight of him; and had he not feared the ſtrict and impartial juſtice of the Venetians, he would have put him openly to death. But not being able to do this with ſafety to himſelf, he degraded him from his commiſſion, and permitted him no longer to remain in the company. Hence aroſe between them the moſt bitter enmity that can be conceived; and the enſign, the greateſt of all villains, ſtudied only how he might be revenged on the Moor. He went to the lieutenant, who was cured and walked about with his wooden leg, and ſaid to him, "The time is now come when you may be revenged for the loſs of your leg; and if you will come with me to Venice, I will tell you who the aſſaſſin was. Here I dare not inform you for many reaſons; but there I will be your witneſs

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in a court of juſtice." The lieutenant, who felt himſelf violently exaſperated againſt the perſon though unknown to him, thanked the enſign, and came away with him to Venice. When they were arrived, the enſign told him that the Moor was the perſon who had cut off his leg, becauſe he ſuſpected him of adultery with his wife, and that for the ſame reaſon he had murdered her, and afterwards given out that ſhe had been killed by the ceiling's falling in upon her. The lieutenant on hearing this, immediately accuſed the Moor before the Council of the injury done to himſelf and the murder of Deſdemona; and the enſign being called as a witneſs, aſſerted the truth of both theſe accuſations, and added that the Moor had communicated to him the whole project, with a view of perſuading him to execute both theſe crimes; and when he had murdered his wife from the impulſe of a furious jealouſy, he had related to him the manner in which he had put her to death. The Venetian magiſtrates hearing that one of their fellow-citizens had been treated with ſo much cruelty by a bar-

barbarian, had the Moor arreſted in Cyprus and brought to Venice, where, by means of the torture, they endeavoured to find out the truth. But the Moor poſſeſſed force and conſtancy of mind ſufficient to undergo the torture without confeſſing any thing; and though by his firmneſs he eſcaped death at this time, he was after a long impriſonment condemned to perpetual exile, in which he was afterwards killed, as he deſerved to be, by his wife's Relations.

The enſign returned to his country, where ſtill continuing his old practices, he accuſed one of his companions of having attempted to murder a nobleman who was his enemy. The man was taken up and put to the torture, and denying firmly the crime laid to his charge, his accuſer was alſo put to the torture; where he was racked ſo violently that his vitals were injured, and upon being conducted home he died in great agony. Thus was the Divine vengeance executed againſt thoſe who had murdered the innocent Deſdemona.

The

The enſign's wife, who had been informed of the whole affair, after his death thus circumſtantially related the Story.

Giraldi Cintio wrote a hundred novels, entitled Ekatommithé. Theſe are divided into Decades; and the Moor of Venice is the ſeventh of the Third Decade. The edition is in two volumes, and was printed by Leonardo Torrentino, in the year 1561.

ON

OTHELLO.

ON

OTHELLO.

PERHAPS we are indebted for the moſt delightful modern compoſitions to thoſe minds of which the powers were firſt awakened by the wildneſs of Gothic fictions, and afterwards corrected by the hiſtorians, or chaſtened by the critics of Greece. Such, we are informed by himſelf, was the progreſs of Rouſſeau's fancy; and ſuch probably was the education and diſcipline of Shakeſpeare's Muſe. The tenderneſs of romantic paſſion is admirably adapted to ſoften the rigour of the Greek academy, while the juſtneſs of Platonic reaſoning and the truth of Ariſtotelian principles are calculated to ſuppreſs the wonders and extravagances of Gothic invention.

There is ſomewhere a defect in ancient poetry if Euripides (who diſguſts us in every ſcene with ſhort and ſatiric declamations againſt the female ſex) is ſtill acknowledged to be the moſt pathetic of the Greek tragedians. In the very moment that we are lamenting his want of feeling and humane affection, we are overpowered by the tranſcendent vigour of his genius. But more perfect poems might certainly be written by one whoſe paſſions are liable to receive impreſſions from every natural incentive, and whoſe ſcience enables him to govern the ſprings on which the theory of emotion depends.

To this ſuperior degree of excellence Shakeſpeare ſeems to have arrived whenever his ſubject was founded on romance. Hiſtory he always treated with that reſpectful awe and deference due to an auſtere preceptor, whom we are contented to admire and imitate. The lighter productions of fancy were the inſpirers of his youthful dreams, the companions of his early ſport, whom he loved and cheriſhed, but

endea-

endeavoured to excel. From them he probably began his poetical career; and to theſe he conſtantly returned with all the paſſion of a fond remembrance, and with all the emulation of an ancient Rival.

There is ſomething ſo enchanting in the very irregularities of theſe compoſitions, that he willingly adopted even their flights, and excentricities. Perhaps too he was induced by another motive ſuggeſted by Horace, and ſo natural to noble minds—The deſire of obtaining victory againſt a foe of formidable aſpect and gigantic Force.

Ille per extentum funem mihi poſſe videtur
Ire poeta, meum qui pectus inaniter angit,
Inritat, mulcet, falſis terroribus implet
Ut magus; et modo me Thebis, modo ponit Athenis.

It is not very raſh to conclude from this paſſage, that the Roman critic ſecretly wiſhed to reſcue the theatre of his country from the ſubjection in which it was held to the authorities of Greece, and from that uniformity in which

it was conſequently impriſoned. If this interpretation be allowed, it was the opinion of Horace that the unity of place (and of courſe the unity of time) would deſerve to be repealed as a law of dramatic poetry, whenever a genius ſhould ariſe ſufficiently powerful to carry the magic of illuſion beyond that narrow ſphere in which it was left by the poets of antiquity. But authorities are not wanted to juſtify applauſe when pleaſure is felt; and the voice of Nature alone is warranted in pronouncing an opinion, when that pleaſure has been weighed againſt the ſenſations produced by more regular and artificial Models.

In the tragedy of the Moor of Venice the unity of action, which indeed ought never to be violated, is acknowledged even by the ſeverer critics to be complete. The conſiſtency of the ſubordinate characters, and the wonderful ſkill with which they are all made to contribute to the propoſed cataſtrophe, have been fully diſcuſſed, and have received their due portion of praiſe. The character of

Othello

Othello alone, proved by the preceding novel to have been almoſt wholly created by the imagination of Shakeſpeare, ſeems never to have been ſufficiently conſidered, though it eminently deſerves to be examined with a view to poetical effect. We are equally intereſted and ſurpriſed by every part of it; by his education, his temper, his moral and religious Principles.

So much of the conduct of men depends on the habits of early life, that it was extremely neceſſary for the poet to deſcribe firſt the original occupations of Othello, that theſe might ſerve as a ground-work to the probability of ſucceeding fictions. This baſis of his character was to be conſiſtent with the merit that had raiſed him to his diſtinguiſhed rank in the Venetian army; and to explain the ſingular paſſion * with which he had inſpired the

* The French tranſlator has hazarded an ingenious conjecture on this ſubject, though it is evidently ill founded. Becauſe Deſdemona mentions a maid called Barbara,

 that

the tender and unfortunate Deſdemona, as well as to lay open the ſource of his opinions and his foibles. To illuſtrate theſe two leading incidents of his life, it was certainly not injudicious to throw a blaze of glory round the commencement of his fortune, oppoſing a ſeries of dangers to his progreſs that could only be ſurmounted by conſummate Valour.

"She lov'd me for the dangers I had paſt."

But as if theſe were not ſufficient to excite a general ſympathy and affection, the poet has repreſented Deſdemona as the moſt benevolent and compaſſionate of human beings; and, by a beautiful management, has effected her

that waited on her mother, he has contended that this was a black woman; and that Deſdemona had early loſt her averſion to the colour of Othello. But Barbara is ſtill a common Chriſtian name both in Venice and in England. Beſides, for this purpoſe it was injudicious to mention her only in the concluſion of the play; and is inconſiſtent with the ſurpriſe of Brabanzio and his imputation of witchcraft to the Moor.

ruin

ruin by means of that very compaſſion when excited a ſecond time by the diſgrace of Caſſio. Of his military merit and capacity the mind is left to form its own ideas, aſſiſted only by obſcure indications, that extol far more than the explicit detail of hiſtory, or the pomp of exceſſive praiſe. The very early period at which he began his courſe of warlike employments, the confuſed and marvellous account of his imminent perils and ſingular eſcapes, his zeal and fondneſs for the ſervice, his diſlike of peace and leiſure, are all ſo many maſter-ſtrokes of Shakeſpeare's pencil that finiſh the portrait of a brave and experienced General.

" For ſince theſe arms of mine had ſev'n years pith,
" Till now, ſome nine moons waſted, they have us'd
" Their deareſt action in the tented field;
" * * * * * * *
" The tyrant cuſtom * * * *
" Hath made the flinty and ſteel couch of war
" My thrice driven bed of down. I do agnize
" A natural and prompt alacrity
" I find in hardneſs; * * * *
" * * * * * * *."

Such a train of youthful adventures, where every thing deareſt to humanity was daily hazarded, working upon a noble temper, naturally deſtroyed all petty conſiderations of detriment and intereſt. The mind thus ſchooled thinks not of adopting the common meaſures of prudence, and ſcorns to make eſtimates and diviſions of natural ſentiment. It knows no medium between the extremes of a boundleſs confidence and an implacable hatred. When therefore his tenderneſs for Deſdemona and his attachment to Caſſio had once yielded to the ſurmiſes of jealouſy, he ruſhed with a reſiſtleſs impetuoſity into the bloody and horrible projects of aſſaſſination and Murder.

His temper was haſty and violent, free and generous; neither prone to ſuſpicion, nor apt without reaſon to forgive; neither inclined to diſturb itſelf with doubts, nor qualified afterwards to reſtore its own tranquility. Diſſimulation is a vice, of which the practice was to him not only unintelligible, but of which, without a prompter, he would not perhaps

have

have known the exiſtence. From the nature of his paſt life he was ſo little acquainted with the arts of converſation and the modes of ſociety, that on his elevation, probably for the firſt time, to a portion of civil authority, and his entrance into family affairs and domeſtic regulations, ſome confidential perſon became neceſſary for advice and inſtruction. Iago ſeemed to be formed for the perfect execution of this office.

" This fellow's of exceeding honeſty
" And knows all qualities, with a learned ſpirit,
" Of human dealings. ———
" * * * * * *."

The dark and inſidious practices of this monſter were ſo far from his thoughts, that even in the laſt moments of his guilt and deſpair he expreſſes his aſtoniſhment at the proceeding, and his curioſity to know the Cauſe.

" Will you, I pray, demand that demi-devil,
" Why he hath thus enſnar'd my ſoul and body?"

In

In his love as well as in his jealouſy there are ſingular and original traits that belong excluſively to Othello's character. A ſoldier of fortune in foreign ſervice, whoſe enterprizes are ſucceſsful and whoſe merit eclipſes the fame of his rivals, generally excites more envy than admiration. But the diſtinction between foreigner and native is infinitely weaker than between the Moors and the inhabitants of Europe. Deſdemona was perhaps the firſt that had felt and expreſſed a real and unaffected ſorrow for the hardſhips he had ſuffered;

"And *he* lov'd her, that ſhe did pity them."

His mind perhaps then firſt conceived the exquiſite pleaſure of ſocial communication and attachment; and opened to him the enchanting proſpect of a milder happineſs than he had hitherto enjoyed. His vehement and fiery diſpoſition graſped with avidity this unuſual joy, and hinged his future hopes and affections on the object with ſuch force, that

ſepa-

ſeparation muſt produce the moſt tremendous and fatal Convulſions.

When Shakeſpeare has once eſtabliſhed a principle of conduct, that principle is not only obſerved, but frequently converted into a motive for ſucceeding revolutions of ſentiment. The complexion of Othello, that had placed him at ſuch a diſtance from Deſdemona's love, and with other conſiderations had ſo much encreaſed his tenderneſs and gratitude for her paſſionate declarations in his favour, becomes afterwards a powerful weapon for the arm of jealouſy.

" ——— Haply, for I am black,
" And have not thoſe ſoft parts of converſation
" That chamberers have; or for I am declin'd
" Into the vale of years;—yet that's not much.—
" She's gone; I am abus'd; and my relief
" muſt be—to loath her. ———
" * * * * * *."

It was the pity that Deſdemona had firſt felt for his early misfortunes, that had perſuaded

ſuaded Othello of the ſincerity of her affection. The ideas then of love and compaſſion were from that moment connected ſo cloſely in his mind, that when ſhe apparently wept for the death of Caſſio, he inſtantly acquired force and cruelty enough to execute his ſanguinary Purpoſe.

A ſenſation continually preſent to the mind is ſhifted about by all the paſſions, and becomes at one time the ſupport of confidence, and at another the ſlave of Suſpicion.

From the bleſſings of love and confidence ſo congenial to his mind, he is hurled into all the tortures of jealouſy which his nature abhorred. The ſociety he had gained, the ſympathy he had excited, muſt be now abandoned; and his miſery is aggravated by all thoſe ſingularities of his fortune and ſituation which had before augmented his joy. The ſolitude of Philoctetes is not more wretched, nor his anguiſh more deplorable.

" Had

" Had it pleas'd Heaven
" To try me with affliction; had it rain'd
" All kind of ſores and ſhames on my bare head;
" Steep'd me in poverty to the very lips;
" Given to Captivity me and my hopes;
" I ſhould have found in ſome place of my ſoul
" A drop of patience. But alas! to make me
" A fixed figure for the hand of Scorn
" To point his ſlow and moving finger at—
" Yet could I bear that too, well, very well;
" But there, where I have garner'd up my heart,
" Where either I muſt live or bear no life,
" The fountain from the which my current runs
" Or elſe dries up; to be diſcarded thence,
" Or keep it as a ciſtern for foul toads
" To knot and gender in: turn thy complexion there
" Patience, thou young and roſe-lipp'd cherubim:
" There, there look grim as hell."

The moral character and opinions of Othello are more the reſult of momentary feeling and the ſuggeſtions of his own private ſenſe of honour, than the conſequences of ſyſtem or the juſt deductions of reaſon. His education had precluded the general exerciſe of deliberation, and his paſſions were gaining force, while his reaſon languiſhed in the weakneſs which in-

activity

activity produces. A ſenſe of honour which ſo imperfectly ſupplies its place, ſteps in on every occaſion with fragments of advice that involve him in the moſt ſingular and ſurpriſing contradictions. When his frame is convulſed and his ſpirit trembling at the knowledge of Deſdemona's infidelity, he determines to commit a crime unworthy (as he confeſſes and laments) of the military name and profeſſion; but in the gratification of his revenge feels not a pang of remorſe for that virtue which he abandons.

" Oh now for ever
" Farewell the tranquil mind! farewell content!
" Farewell the plum'd troops and the big war,
" That make ambition virtue! O farewell!
" * * * * * *
" ——— Othello's occupation's gone!"

Imperfectly however as this ſenſe ſupplies the place of reaſon in a moral view, it is certainly calculated to produce poetically a much greater beauty and variety of effect. The ardour and ſurpriſe of poetry have nothing in common

common with the rational and tranquil proceedings of prudence; where, without the aid of imagination, all that is to happen may be foretold by the ſimple force of ſagacity, founded on experience. Othello jealous in his chamber, and Achilles angry in his tent, are pictures that intereſt us more than Æneas piouſly bearing away his father from the flames of Troy, or patiently expoſtulating with the wrath of Juno and the fury of the elements. A burning city and a tempeſt raiſed for the purpoſe of executing Divine vengeance, are dazzling and ſublime objects; but when the hero in the midſt of them wants energy and fire, in the place of real and genuine paſſion, we are cheated with the weakneſs of deſcriptive Poetry.

Happy had it been for mankind, if all the miſchiefs with which ſuperſtition has deformed ſociety could have been compenſated by the graces with which it has embelliſhed poetry. So ſtrong indeed is the alliance between thoſe two ſources of terrible and romantic fiction,

that

that an epic or a tragic character is not conſidered as complete without ſome tincture of religious ecſtaſy. The fancy of Shakeſpeare, though exceſſively delighted with ſuch embelliſhments, did not however adopt them raſhly without firſt being aſſured of their fitneſs and congruity. The wandering and military life of Othello muſt be ſuppoſed to have prevented him from conforming generally to the tenets of any particular ſect; and to have left his religious faith in ſtill more uncertainty than his moral principles. Whatever ſtruck his imagination in the belief of either people with whom he was moſt converſant, as applicable to his own fortune, naturally reſted on his mind, and rendered it a tiſſue of the Chriſtian and Mahometan perſuaſions. The ſingularity of his adventures, his numberleſs perils and eſcapes, might induce him almoſt reaſonably to receive as true the potency of ſpells and the doctrines of predeſtination. The pleaſures of love and the charms of beauty figured with ſo much diſtinction in the Mahometan ſcheme of happineſs, that whatever

ever ſuperſtition conſecrated to the benefit or protection of mankind, was endued with a capacity to improve or perpetuate theſe enjoyments. Hence has Shakeſpeare judiciouſly taken occaſion to confer a ſort of preternatural importance on the handkerchief that was the laſt fatal confirmation of his jealouſy.

" ——: That handkerchief
" Did an Ægyptian to my mother give:
" She was a charmer, and could almoſt read the thoughts
" of people.
" She told her, while ſhe kept it, it would make her
" amiable:
" Subdue my father intirely to her love; but if ſhe
" loſt it,
" Or made a gift of it, my father's eye
" Should hold her loathly, and his ſpirits ſhould hunt
" After new fancies: *
" * * * * * * *."

The idea of an irreverſible predetermined deſtiny returns to his mind, when, conſcious of the innocence of his former life and inten-

* See the Appendix.

tions, he finds himſelf involved in the moſt horrible of crimes; when, after all the dangers he had paſſed, he ſees that his courage can no longer protect him though apparently in a ſtate of tranquility and peace.

" Who can controul his fate?——
" * * * * * * *
" Man but a ruſh againſt Othello's breaſt,
" And he retires; ——
" * * * * * * *."

In his death the ſame ſenſe of honour ſtill prevails. In his laſt moments he is exhibited in all the agony of guilt without one ſymptom of fear; he ſhews a tender and anxious regard for his reputation, but none for himſelf; obſcurely hoping that the ſervices which he has rendered to the ſtate may diminiſh the infamy attached to a foul and atrocious murder.

APPENDIX.

APPENDIX.

THOSE who are yet to be convinced of the real exiſtence of a belief in the force of charms among the diſciples of Mahomet, may compare this ſpeech of Othello with the following copy of a paper, which Wortley Montague wore about his neck till the moment in which he died at Padua. It is by no means fair to conclude from ſuch a circumſtance, that this ſingular character had deſerted the Chriſtian religion. The queſtion of his converſion will require ſtronger proofs; as this might have been worn only for the ſake of travelling with greater ſecurity in thoſe inhoſpitable Regions.

The original charm is written in Arabic, and now in the poſſeſſion of Signor Marſili, Profeſſor of Botany at Padua. The preſent tranſlation was done not from the Arabic, but from an Italian verſion, which the proprietor had cauſed to be executed with great care and Fidelity.

IN THE NAME OF GOD, MISERICORDIA.

WE are told in the Tales of Seeich Gemaluddin Juſof (to whom may the mercy of God be ſhewn) that Haliſſa, the Lord of Credenti, had in his ſervice a hundred young ſlaves, all of whom were of extraordinary beauty. It happened one day that a black woman, called Mergian, was preſented to him, for whom it was impoſſible to awaken the paſſions of whoever beheld her. To ſuch a degree was ſhe diſguſting and deformed. The moment Haliſſa ſaw her his affections were raiſed to the greateſt height. He fell in love and neglected the other ſlaves. Day and night he

he lived only with her, and placed in her hands all his poſſeſſions. He could not be without her for a ſingle moment, and conſulted her in affairs of the utmoſt importance, to the great aſtoniſhment of the matrons and other ſlaves. By the divine permiſſion ſhe one day fell ſick; and her infirmity continually increaſing, was accompliſhed alſo in her that divine decree which circumſcribes and renders inevitable the final cloſe of mortal life. She was afterwards ſtripped to be buried. But this was not permitted by her enamoured maſter, who for three days and three nights took no food, not ſo much as a drop of water; and deplored his loſs beyond the reach of Conſolation.

The holy miniſters of the canon aſſembled about him, and by various exhortations prevailed on him to allow her to be interred. As they were carrying her body to its tomb, the following prayer fell from the ringlets of her hair, and was immediately carried to the Sovereign. As ſoon as he had read it, he deſired

ſired to ſee the dead body; which then appear-ed, even in his eyes, a frightful and deformed ſlave. He was ſtruck with ſurpriſe and aſto-niſhment. When the miniſters of the court knew that Mergian no longer appeared beauti-ful in the eyes of her maſter, they diſcovered this change to be occaſioned by the pious eja-culation which ſhe had conſtantly worn. So that taking it from the hands of their Sove-reign, and conſidering its ſubſtance, they de-clared it to be good, of incomparable accuracy, and worthy of their entire approbation. This ought to be worn about the perſon or in the hair, in order to feel its prodigious effects. It renders the perſon who wears it invulnerable to the darts of ſlander, preſerves them from enchantments, and every other perverſe opera-tion of human malice, and gives duration and increaſe to proſperity and pleaſure. Who-ever doubts the efficacy of this relique, is cer-tainly both Atheiſt and Infidel. May the Lord God preſerve us from ſuch Blind-neſs.

PRAYER.

PRAYER.

I implore the aid of thee, O moſt high God, to whom are due both homage and praiſe; who by thine own inſcrutable means haſt eſtabliſhed poverty and riches; of Thee, Inhabitant of the Empyrean firmament, munificent and liberal, who canſt give life to things inanimate; of Thee who haſt created man, woman, and inviſible ſpirits; who canſt preſerve to us that which thou haſt given us, who canſt diſpoſe at thy pleaſure all things upon earth; King of kings, and Author of the Books on the Holy Law; of Thee, from whom are derived all merits and all graces, endued with infinite power and greatneſs: Lord of the World and of Eternity—God omnipotent, whoſe divine attributes I worſhip with all humility: I invoke that aid which thou haſt promiſed me: Thou who haſt created the darkneſs and the light of the Sun and of the Moon;

Moon; who haſt diſtinguiſhed and ſeparated the Days from the Nights; who haſt made the Heavens, and all that is therein; who with provident counſel haſt created Paradiſe and Hell; who haſt made to appear thy wiſdom in the formation of the Koran; Ornament of true believers, in the creation of Adam and of Eve, and in that of Enoch; in the invention of the Ark of Noah; in the events with which the life of Abraham has been accompanied; of Iſmael, of Joſeph, of Jacob, of Job, of Zachariah, of Lot, of David, of Loeman the wiſe man of Arabia, of Moſes, of Jeſus, and of Maria: Thou who art the Creator of the Earth and of the Sea, the Author of the Moſaic Law, of the Goſpel, and of the Pſalms of David: Thou who haſt inſtituted the holy pilgrimage to Mecca; who inſpireſt mildneſs and perſuaſion into the Prophets, among whom thou haſt in an eſpecial manner diſtinguiſhed Mahomet; who haſt given ſometimes, to the aſtoniſhment of mankind, the power of ſpeech to brutes; who art the

the Guardian of the human race, — do thou guard me and keep me in thy grace, ſince there is neither power nor virtue except in Thee alone, O God, great ſublime, and munificent.

THE END.